



Quarterly Report 1 July 2016 – 30 September 2016

IRTOUN “Rise Again”

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)



Picture – Photo mosaic in Ansongo Cercle, photos by Field Team, Mercy Corps

1. Executive Summary

With the support of USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Mercy Corps' Irtoun program offers a package of integrated activities designed to enhance food security and economic resilience of communities recovering from the effects of conflict in Ansongo Circle of Gao Region and in Timbuktu and Gourma Rharous Circles of Timbuktu Region in Northern Mali. The program, initially funded for a period of 2 years from 11 February 2014-10 February 2016, was extended through two no-cost extensions through 30 September 2016, and received a cost modification to extend the project until 30 June 2017. At the end of FY16, the program has achieved or exceeded all of its objectives under the original implementation plan, and is in the start-up phase of the additional activities under the cost modification.

During the quarterly reporting period, the program achieved the following:

“Irtoun 1”

- Monitored and supported 45 village committees responsible for animal feed management to open accounts with microfinance institutions
- Awareness-raising of the population on best practices for animal feed harvesting and storage
- Advisory support and monitoring of the 22 veterinary assistants
- Follow-up with 53 micro-entrepreneurs on the management of their small enterprises
- Monitoring of VSLAs and village agents in the 4 communes of Ansongo

“Irtoun 2”

- Kick-off meeting held in September 2016 for Irtoun II to review intervention strategy, budget, targets, timeline, procurement plan and staffing plan;
- Support to the 51 market gardening groups who participated in Irtoun I to prepare for the October 2016 vegetable planting season. This support included working with groups to plan for their season, calculate the speculations they plan to undertake and expected financial gain, and to leverage matching funding to the Mercy Corps seed vouchers;
- Identification of 25 new market gardening groups in Ansongo Circle, and ongoing identification of 50 groups in Timbuktu and Gourma Rharous Circles; and
- Recruitment of staff for Irtoun II in Ansongo and Timbuktu.

Table 1. Award-Level Beneficiaries

	Irtoun 1	Irtoun 2
Total beneficiaries targeted	25 060 beneficiaries (3 580 households)	49 200 beneficiaries (7 029 households)
Total beneficiaries reached this quarter	36 869 beneficiaries ¹ (5 267 households)	
Total cumulative number of beneficiaries reached	66 269 beneficiaries ¹ (9 467 households)	

<u>Sector #1</u>	Objective 1: Vulnerable households in Northern Mali recover productive agricultural livelihoods
Agriculture & Food Security	
Beneficiaries Targeted for Irtoun I	8 400 beneficiaries (1 200 households)
Beneficiaries Targeted for Irtoun II Cost Modification	39 600 beneficiaries (6,600 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	17 136 beneficiaries (2 448 households)
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	45 052 beneficiaries ¹ (6 436 households)
<u>Sector #2</u>	Objective 2: Vulnerable households increase incomes by engaging in local markets
Economic Recovery & Market Systems	
Beneficiaries Targeted for Irtoun I	19 803 beneficiaries (2 829 households)
Beneficiaries Targeted for Irtoun II Cost Modification	15,600 individuals (2,600 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	19 803 beneficiaries (2 829 households)

Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached

21 217 beneficiaries (3 031 households)

Please note: Total beneficiary numbers are a count of direct and indirect beneficiaries (household members) that also benefit from activities undertaken by direct beneficiaries.

¹Indirect beneficiaries are estimated based on average figures for household size, and beneficiary counting discount has been applied to total number of beneficiaries as mid-term evaluation found that 13% of beneficiaries participate in two program components and 3% of beneficiaries participate in three program components.

2. Program Overview

In response to an extended period of conflict and drought in northern Mali, Mercy Corps designed the Irtoun program to enhance food security and economic recovery in Ansongo, Timbuktu and Gourma Rharous Circles by strengthening agricultural production, helping vulnerable families protect their animal assets, and restoring livelihoods while building longer term economic resilience. Irtoun II, a cost modification of the original Irtoun program, builds on the first award, expanding the geographic footprint of the program, and integrating new activities including apprenticeships for young Malians to gain employment-relevant experience, as well as conflict mitigation activities to enable farmers and herders to reduce conflict and enhance shared access to natural resources.

The objectives of the program are:

1. Vulnerable households in Northern Mali recover productive agricultural livelihoods, and
2. Vulnerable households increase incomes by engaging in local markets

Immediate household needs are addressed through cash-for-work activities to enable households to meet their essential basic needs, as well as animal feed vouchers to support pastoralists to acquire fodder during the animal lean season to reduce animal losses. Through a market-based approach, Irtoun also facilitates the recovery of market gardening activities to enable farmers- primarily women- to expand their production and link to local markets, and addresses the needs of pastoralists for improved fodder and health care services for their livestock, while promoting behavior change around fodder conservation and planning. CfW projects support the recovery of livelihoods by helping communities to rehabilitate grazing land, irrigation systems and agricultural infrastructure degraded during the conflict.

Additionally, Irtoun assists micro-entrepreneurs affected by insecurity to resume their small businesses through entrepreneurship training and cash grants to re-start their businesses, and supports youth to build employability skills and strengthen relationships with private sector employers through apprenticeships. Finally, all Irtoun beneficiaries are encouraged to join community based village savings and loan associations (VSLA), which act as a form of safety net to strengthen recovery efforts, allowing participants to benefit from improved financial management, enhanced savings practices and opportunities to access credit to support economic growth and livelihood diversification. Finally, social cohesion and conflict resolution activities will enhance the shared management of natural resources, reducing local conflict, particularly between farmers and herders.

By intervening and supporting in key sectors of agricultural and economic livelihood development, the Irtoun program provides communities with essential ingredients to solidify a peaceful and productive future.

3. Contextual Update

Agriculture

Over the course of the past quarter, the food security situation has declined as households await the harvest at the end of the year. Vulnerable households are in need of food assistance in the valleys, particularly during this lean period. Despite the markets being well supplied in cereals, the costs of these commodities are increasing and vulnerable households have little access to these items as a result of the drop in purchasing power.

The 2016 – 2017 agricultural season began during the past quarter, with farming operations (plowing, sowing, transplanting) beginning on small village irrigated plots, in fully or partially submerged rice fields, as well as in non-river-fed fields. Within small irrigated plots, the main challenge has been that

many water pumps are in disrepair and regularly break down, reducing the production capacity and incurring costs to the rural producers. Rice planting took place primarily in the higher parts of the river, but were limited by low volumes of rainfall in August, especially in Ansongo commune, and then threatened again by the rise of the river that flooded many rice-producing lowlands, causing a shortage of exploitable land.

2016 saw significant flooding during the second half of August, which recorded record flood levels not seen for the past 30 years. The flooding caused significant concern for rice producers as well as for households situated close to the river, whose fields and houses were threatened. As a result of the delay in the rainy seasons, rice fields were flooded without the rice plants reaching a suitable stage to support the water level, causing some producers to lose their investment. The damage was more prominent in Mopti and southern circles of Timbuktu, such as Dire and Niafunke, and did not cause significant damage in project areas.

Many farmers across Ansongo circle fear a poor harvest following heavy rains, an early end to the rainy season, and its poor distribution in time and space, followed by a proliferation of crickets that destroyed young shoots. According to the local farming service of Ansongo, losses are estimated at approximately 50 %, whereas according to community representatives (following the flooding and the runoff water from the torrential rains) nearly 80% of cultivated areas are lost. Hope in the area is now focused on the small village irrigated plots, where rice is growing, but development is proving very poor compared to other crops. Mercy Corps teams will monitor the impact of the flooding and poor harvest within the target areas, and as required, will integrate farmers who lost their harvests into CfW activities to address their needs, but will ensure close coordination with other actors to avoid duplication.

Pastoral Activities

Livestock fattening is slowly improving as green pastures (winter season) are beginning to appear, and the animal health situation remains stable. Herds are beginning to move towards the great pastures of the high plains, and nomadic populations are undertaking transhumance. Currently, the state of pastures allows livestock feeding, but the situation remains concerning for the next lean season, as many pastures have not sprouted well, and the grasses that constitute the essential pastures (a typical high production of forage biomass) have not sprouted at all. The situation is worse in the area of Ansongo, where pastoralists and agro-pastoralists are making a rare move from Gourma toward Haoussa.

All four communes in Ansongo report that markets are well supplied with hippograss, with prices varying between 500F and 750F. Nevertheless, the heavy rain has affected the quality by wetting the straw.

Political Situation

At the national level, the government is moving forward with organizing communal elections for the 20th of November. Across all communes, the process of candidate selection has begun, and electoral lists are being prepared. As candidates and parties vie for power, tensions have been exacerbated at the community level, particularly because members of various armed groups are positioning themselves to participate in the elections. Opposition groups will be organizing a peaceful protest in Bamako, as they believe that the conditions are not met for the organization of free and transparent elections across the national territory.

The situation in Bamako has been increasingly volatile, following the arrest and subsequent release of radio host/journalist Ras Bath, which triggered a violent protest in Bamako which led to the death of at least one person, injured 19 and the local tribunal charged with hearing the case was burnt by protestors. Moreover, operations to demolish and evict informal businesses across Bamako have created widespread discontentment, as thousands of small businesses owners and employees lost their livelihoods.

Humanitarian Situation

The humanitarian situation has been characterized by flooding in Bara Commune following torrential rains in the second half of July, leaving many people homeless. Also, the communes of Ansongo and Ouatagouna have recorded an important return of refugees coming from Niger and evicted from Algeria.

Over the past quarter, partner organizations undertook the following activities:

- ACF-Espagne carried out a general food distribution to 3,499 households in the communes of Bara, Ansongo, Bourra and Ouatagouna, over the course of which each beneficiary household received 54 kg of millet, 9 kg of black-eyed peas, 4.5l kg of oil, 6.5kg of corn-soy blend and 0.9 kg of salt. It also carried out 3 cash transfers to 3839 households, where each beneficiary household receives a sum of 120,000 FCFA.
- The UN Food and Agriculture Organization carried out a seed and NPK fertilizer distribution for certain village irrigated plots in the circle of Ansongo, and supported farmer groups with fuel and motor oil for their water pumps.
- The Food Security Commission of Mali distributed 25 kg of millet to each household in Ansongo cercle.
- The National Direction of Agriculture distributed quality-controlled improved rice seeds to rice producers in Ansongo, including varieties such as Khaoughen, Sétassoké and DM 16.

Security

The security situation has significantly declined over the past quarter, and armed actors have perpetrated repeated attacks against the Malian armed forces and their international allies in the North. There has been a significant increase in acts of banditry, including vehicle hijacking and armed robbery on the roads between Ansongo and Labbezzanga as well as Ansongo and Menaka, resulting in several civilians deaths and the loss of money and other goods.

MINUSMA's mandate was extended by the Security Council, and a clear message was sent to all stakeholders in the conflict to move forward with the implementation of the Algiers Peace Accord. Over the past quarter, the future of the Accord was called into question, as armed fighting resumed between GATIA and CMA forces for control of Kidal. Despite attempts by the Malian government to negotiate a ceasefire, tensions remain, and suspected linkages between GATIA and the Malian government call into question the intentions of these negotiations. Recent information indicates that the two parties are seeking further negotiations in order to end the fighting in Kidal and move forward with the installation of interim authorities. At the same time, the government is conducting an information campaign in the North to raise awareness around the purpose of the interim authorities, who are opposed by a majority of citizens.

Noteworthy events that occurred during this quarter include:

- Confrontations between GATIA and the CMA have resulted in a high number of casualties, and the population worries about a continued escalation of conflict.
- An attack against the FAMA military camp in Nampala and in Tenenkou resulted in 5 deaths and many injuries for the FAMA and several Malian soldiers were taken hostage.
- Carjackings of local transporters between Ansongo and Menaka as well as Ansongo and Tessit are common, with citizens suffering from loss of money and goods.
- NGOs continue to be victim of vehicle thefts in Gao, Ansongo and Ménaka.
- Self-defense groups between Ansongo and Labbezzanga have seized control of the road to ensure security for travelers.

4. Performance Summary

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Vulnerable households in Northern Mali recover productive agricultural livelihoods
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Beneficiaries Targeted	Irtoun I: 24 010 beneficiaries (3 430 households) Irtoun II: 39 600 beneficiaries (6 600 households), inclusive of Irtoun I beneficiaries that will continue receiving support	Budget:	Irtoun I: \$ 1 375 056 Irtoun II: \$1 628 380	
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 17 136 beneficiaries (2 448 households)	Cumulative: 45 052 beneficiaries¹ (6 436 households)		
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo Circle; Ansongo, Bourra, Tin Hama, Tessit, Outtagouna communes Timbuktu Region of Northern Mali, Timbuktu Circle; Bourem Inaly, Alafia and Lafia communes; Timbuktu Region of Northern Mali: Gourma Rharous Circle; Serere, Banikane, and Rharous Communes			
Sub-Sector 1.1: Livestock				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.1.1: Number of animals benefiting from or affected by livestock activities	0	Irtoun I: 2 000	20 971	May 2016
		Irtoun II: 40 000	0	In progress
Indicator 1.1.2: Number of people benefiting from livestock activities, disaggregated by sex	Male: 0	Irtoun I: 490	3 434	September 2016
		Irtoun II: 1 400	130	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun I: 510	569	September 2016
		Irtoun II: 1 600	0	In progress
Indicator 1.1.3: Number of veterinary interventions (e.g. treatments, vaccinations)	0	Irtoun II: 40 000	1 936	September 2016
Indicator 1.1.4: Number of animals treated	0	Irtoun II: 40 000	0	In progress
Indicator 1.1.5 Number of hectares of pastureland rehabilitated through cash-for-work interventions	0	Irtoun II: 200 ha	0	In progress
# Of community workers trained / refreshed, by sex and age	Male: 0	Irtoun I: 30	44	November 2015
Sub-Sector 1.2 : Improving Agricultural Production				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.2.1: Projected increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency due to distributed seed systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households²	N/A	Irtoun I: 10 months	8.1 months	In progress
		Irtoun II: 10 months	N/A	
# people benefiting from VFW activities, by sex and age	0	Irtoun I: 1 200	1 250	May 2016
Indicator 1.2.2. Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	Male: 0	Irtoun I: 240	377	May 2016
		Irtoun II: 720	0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun I: 960	952	May 2016
		Irtoun II: 2 880	0	In progress

# of hectares under improved technologies or management practices as a result of USG assistance	0	Irtoun II: TBD	0	In progress
# of farmers and others who have applied improved technologies or management practices as a result of USG assistance	Male: 0	Irtoun II: 720	0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun II: 2 880	0	In progress
# of individuals who have received project supported short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training (including through agricultural extension services)	Male: 0	Irtoun II: 720	0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun II: 2 880	0	In progress
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households increase incomes by engaging in local markets			
Beneficiaries Targeted	Irtoun I: 12 250 beneficiaries (1 750 households) Irtoun II: 15 600 beneficiaries (2 600 households)		Budget:	Irtoun I: \$ 354 819 Irtoun II: \$ 571 621
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 19 803 beneficiaries (2 829 households)		Cumulative: 21 217 beneficiaries (3 031 households)	
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo Circle; Ansongo, Bourra, Tin Hama, Tessit, Outtagouna communes Timbuktu Region of Northern Mali, Timbuktu Circle; Bourem Inaly, Alafia and Lafia communes; Timbuktu Region of Northern Mali: Gourma Rharous Circle; Serere, Banikane, and Rharous Communes			
Sub-Sector 2.1: Livelihoods Restoration				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.1.1: Number of people assisted through livelihoods restoration activities, disaggregated by sex	Male: 0	Irtoun I: 60	83	September 2016
		Irtoun II: 120	0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun I: 90	93	September 2016
		Irtoun II: 180	0	In progress
Indicator 2.1.2: Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	Irtoun I: 80%	N/A	September 2016
		Irtoun II: 80%		In progress
Indicator 2.1.3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	\$0	Irtoun I: \$15 000	\$39 127	September 2016
		Irtoun II: \$75 000	0	In progress
Sub-Sector 2.2: New Livelihoods Development				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.2.1: Number of people assisted through new livelihoods activities, disaggregated by sex	Male: 0	Irtoun II: 120	0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun II: 180	0	In progress

Indicator 2.2.2: Number of new MSEs started	0	Irtoun II: 75	0	In progress
Indicator 2.2.3: Percent of people, by sex, continuing in their new livelihoods by program completion	Male: N/A	Irtoun II: 60 %	N/A	In progress
	Female: N/A	Irtoun II: 60 %	N/A	In progress
Indicator 2.1.3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	\$0	Irtoun II: \$54 000	0	In progress
Sub-Sector 2.2 : Microfinance				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.3.1: Number of people, disaggregated by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households	Male: 0	Irtoun I: 600 Irtoun II: 600	845 0	In progress
	Female: 0	Irtoun I: 1 000 Irtoun II: 1 400	2 010 0	In progress
Indicator 2.3.2: Percentage of financial services accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	Irtoun I: 75% Irtoun II: 95%	98% N/A	In progress

Please note: Total beneficiary numbers are a count of direct and indirect beneficiaries (household members) that also benefit from activities undertaken by direct beneficiaries.

¹ Indirect beneficiaries are estimated due to unknown figures for household sizes.

² The Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement tool has been used for this indicator.

Sector Summary:

Sector #1: Agriculture & Food Security:

1.1 Livestock

1.1.1 Animal fodder vouchers for 1 000 vulnerable households.

During the previous quarter in the four targeted communes of Ansongo, Mercy Corps supported 800 agro-pastoral households to purchase animal feed through fodder vouchers.

In order to create a sustainable, locally-owned solution to respond to ongoing fodder shortages within the targeted areas, Irtoun livestock agents have supported communities to establish 45 village animal feed management committees (consisting of 158 men and 10 women) in order to ensure a better response to future animal feed needs. These committees manage savings from seasonal working capital and use this capital to re-invest in feed stocking that is marketed during lean seasons, leveling out potential fodder shortages.

Between July and September 2016, Mercy Corps teams conducted support visits to 14 of these committees. The committees have demonstrated the desire to find more formal solutions to manage their savings, but were struggling to use their management tools. The support visits were intended to verify the committee's financial health, understanding of management tools, and the status of their animal feed silos. For 13 of the committees visited, a total of 6,026,000 francs (\$10,300) has been saved and 183 animal feed sacks have been stocked in their silos. Only the committee of Bara commune didn't comprise savings or stock animal feed, as they are planning to begin this activity during the next quarter.

Mercy Corps' livestock agent discussed next steps with the 13 successful committees: ten committees are planning to use part of their savings to re-invest in group income-generating activities in order to reinforce their income before the next lean season; an additional four committees will be saving their funds in an interest-bearing account at a local bank, in anticipation of the next lean season. Committees in Youni, Tassiga and Fafa have launched income-generating activities of selling rice and millet. Committees in Bazi Haoussa and Monzonga sold their animal feed using community-managed credit, in order to liquidate their stocks before the winter season. Selling at credit is risky, as delays in reimbursement or defaults could damage the committees' working capital, but Mercy Corps has committed to following up with these committees during the next quarter and involving local and communal authorities to intervene in situations of non-reimbursement to help protect the investment of the committees.

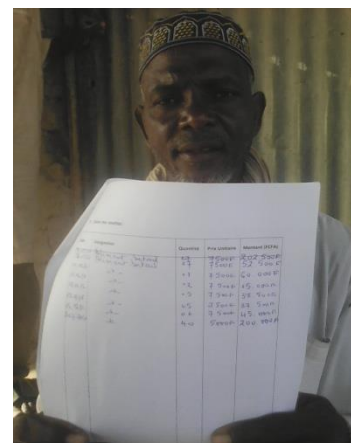


Figure 1. Management tools for Tassiga's committee

After the field visits with the 14 committees, the Irtoun livestock agent contacted the additional 31 groups and recommended that they open up a bank or microfinance account in order to better protect and track their savings, and potentially gain interest on their savings, before the next lean season. As of the end of the quarter, ten committees have already opened accounts with Wouri Bank, a local microfinance institution in Ansongo, and have accumulated with a total of 2,185,000 FCFA in savings.

Fodder/animal feed	Unit	Unit Price
Black-eyed pea leaves	5-kg bale	200 FCFA
Hippo grass	10-kg bale	500 FCFA
Millet bran	500-g tub	100 FCFA
Cattle cakes	700-g tub	200 FCFA

Management support to committees. As a part of Mercy Corps' support to these committees, Irtoun agents have trained all members on four basic entrepreneurship tools: sales registries, stock trackers, receipt books, and expense histories. Only seven of the committees are effectively using one or two of the suggested tools; as such, the field team has conducted refresher trainings with committee treasurers, and is developing ways to adapt the tools to make them more user-friendly,

particularly for illiterate members. Mercy Corps is continuing to conduct individualized coaching with beneficiaries to respond to these challenge and enhance the overall management capacity of the committees.

1.1.2 Capacity building of herders to improve fodder harvesting and storage

Mercy Corps has spent the last year conducting awareness-raising activities with agro-pastoralists around best practices for the storage and conservation of fodder, including small-group trainings and the dissemination of radio messages in local languages. During the past quarter, Mercy Corps conducted refresher training for 130 farmers in Fafa, Tassiga, Youni, Golingo, and Seyna Bellah on animal fodder harvesting and stocking techniques. Riverside grasses (such as hippograss) are abundant in river-fed rice fields, and training covered cutting, drying, and conservation techniques to optimize harvest of these grasses. Mercy Corps agents remain concerned, however, that production quantities will not match demand, and that animals will be left to wander into community and private fields to graze on growing crops, resulting in conflict. As such, Irtoun is continuing its work with village authorities to consult with herders and farmers and find community-specific solutions to ensure that crops are protected and that animals are able to access feed or fodder during the next seasonal animal feed shortage.

Mercy Corps also met with state technical services in target communities in order to evaluate the pastoral situation this quarter. According to their analysis, 2016 has been an atypical year for forage; these technical experts are surprised to see legumes growing in pasture lands where in other years they have seen mostly grasses. In the valleys as well as the plains, a lack of pasture grasses creates the risk of overgrazing in Tin-Hama, where many herds are currently concentrated. In Ansongo, they are

not willing to exclude a fodder crisis in late December 2016. Mercy Corps is meeting with fodder producers to evaluate stocks and determine the way forward to respond to an animal feed crisis.

1.1.3 Training and refresher training for 30 Community Animal Health Workers

Mercy Corps has been working to increase the autonomy of 23 Community Animal Health Workers' (CAHWs) over the past year, helping them to develop business plans for their businesses, and providing them with small business grants to support them to purchase equipment and supplies. Mercy Corps agents conducted follow-up visits during this quarter with 22 Community Animal Health Workers that have received training and support from Mercy Corps since May 2016. During the visits, the Irtoun team noted that CAHWs are having no difficulty using the management tools that Mercy Corps trained them to use, including forms for tracking stocks, expenses, receipts and savings, as well as the monthly report form. Apart from requesting ongoing management support, the agents noted the following two challenges:

- The nomenclature of animal illnesses differs according to locality and local language, which makes it a challenge for CAHWs to report to state veterinarians. Refresher trainings are necessary to ensure that CAHWs use trade-appropriate terms to describe their interventions, in order to facilitate proper diagnosis and treatment and ensure effective disease monitoring.
- The veterinarian of Ansongo Circle is often absent from his station, as he spends much of his time organizing vaccination campaigns and in Bamako. As a result, he has frequently been unavailable to advise CAHWs on sales prices and coordinate their work in the zone. Mercy Corps agents will meet with the veterinarian in question the next time he is in Ansongo to discuss an appropriate management plan that will respond to the CAHWs' needs and clarify expectations.

The table to the right shows the sales update of the CAHWs in May and July.

Among the 22 trained CAHWs, 16 are working directly with their supervising veterinarians, four are working independently, and two (from Bara) have not fully launched their activities due to an animal health training they attended this quarter in Gao. Bourra's CAHWs seem to be extremely motivated, with 871 vaccinated animals, and have the advantage of living in a largely pastoral zone.

Communes	# Community Animal Health Workers	# animals treated
Ouatagouna	8	559
Bourra	7	871
Bara	2	18
Ansongo	5	489
Total	22	1 936



Figure 2. Veterinary medicines stocked in the veterinary refrigerator of Ansongo.

During the monitoring visit, Mercy Corps staff also checked in with the two veterinarians' offices that were given solar refrigerators in 2014 to preserve their medicines. Both refrigerators are still functional after two years, and the Ansongo veterinarian has managed to conserve 200,000 vaccinations for T1 and Ovipete, and has furnished his 16 CAHWs with 450 units of ice. Throughout Bara, Bourra and Ansongo, this veterinarian has managed to vaccinate 71,532 cattle and 91,121 goats and sheep with his team of CAHWs. In Ouatagouna, the veterinarian has conserved 50,000 and 20,000 doses of Ovipete and T1, respectively, but has provided four times the amount of ice to his 3 CAHWs. This team of veterinarian and assistants has managed to vaccinate 15,413 cattle as well as 5,680 sheep and goats, with considerably less resources.

Finally, CAHWs continue to receive support from Irtoun on entrepreneurship and business management skills. Mercy Corps' entrepreneurship agent conducted monitoring visits to the CAHWs, and found that while the CAHWs are having no problems using the entrepreneurship tools. They did have issues purchasing veterinary products, which are often cited by pastoralists as too expensive. The customers complain that similar generic and sometimes low quality versions of the products are sold in the market at 125-175 FCFA, while the high quality versions are

sold by the CAHWs at 350 FCFA. Additional support by veterinarians will be essential to helping CAHWs to better market their products, by sharing information pertaining to product quality.

1.2 Improving Agricultural Production

1.2.1 Voucher for Agricultural inputs for 1,200 farmers

At the beginning of the 2015-16 vegetable gardening season (October 2015), Mercy Corps distributed seed vouchers to 1,200 producers within fifty-one gardening groups, allowing group members to access potatoes, lettuce and onion seeds (as well as other vegetables that are typically planted by these associations) during the market vegetable season. Additionally, Mercy Corps supported three groups to undertake off-season vegetable production, during the season which came to an end in July. While results of the main production season in March proved promising, especially for the potato harvest, off-season production was somewhat disappointing due to destruction by livestock, crickets and other seasonal challenges. At the time of this report, the high season for vegetable gardening has begun for the 2016-17 season. Mercy Corps has begun orientation sessions on managing savings and working capital, and Irtoun I's agricultural cooperatives are preparing to order their seeds in order to be ready for the market rush in late October. Cooperatives have begun transporting fertilizer, composting, and repairing garden enclosures to prepare for the planting season.



Figure 3. Preparing compost pit in Ansongo town.

In order to negotiate bulk prices for seeds, especially potato, cooperatives are working together to consolidate purchase orders between multiple groups. By identifying seed suppliers as a collective of cooperatives, they are able to place their orders in advance, ensure accountability of the supplier to provide high quality seeds on time, and receive significant price reductions compared to what they would get as individuals. To date, the cooperatives have ordered a total of 1,000 cases of potato cuttings for the upcoming season.

In order to scale the Irtoun program under the cost modification, Mercy Corps visited farmer fields in Ansongo, Bourra and Ouatagouna to discuss the program with local state extension services and evaluate sites that are not currently being assisted by other development actors. A table of new groups with potential land is listed below.

Communes	# of groups	Exploited land (Ha)	# members		
			M	F	Total
Tessit	5	2.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ansongo	9	37.1	38	295	333
Bourra	5	4.1	47	111	158
Ouatagouna	6	5.4	61	141	202
Total	25	48.6	146	547	693

1.2.2 Training and support to 50 agricultural/gardening groups

Over the previous year, Mercy Corps provided training to Irtoun I's 51 gardening groups to on skills to enable them to prepare their plots, including irrigation and erosion control trainings, planting and spacing techniques, weeding and crop protection techniques, material support and working capital savings practices. Field agents have worked with these groups to produce compost pits, and recent training and support has focused on preparation of the October 2016 production season. As Irtoun II is identifying 75 additional groups in Ansongo, Timbuktu and Gourma-Rharous, Mercy Corps teams will scale up training in October in order to prepare these gardening groups for input voucher distribution in November.

1.2.3. Rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure – Vouchers for Work

Over the past year under Irtoun first phase, Voucher for Work (VFW) activities focused specifically on improving irrigation infrastructure and completing fencing for community gardens that were struggling, including the Gomno garden in Ansongo. A total of 1,800 meters of irrigation network was dug, increasing access to water for the community garden. For the next phase of the program, field agents will be identifying agriculture infrastructures throughout Ansongo, Timbuktu and Gourma-Rhraous that can serve as the subject of lean season Cash for Work activities.

1.2.4. Revitalize 20 irrigation management committees

This year, Mercy Corps supported 23 irrigation committees to manage their water pumps and put in place watering schedules, as well as to ensure proper fuel management and maintenance for the motorized pumps. These committees are continuing to partner with agriculture associations to improve water management for fields, and Mercy Corps will continue working with them on natural resource management issues and conflict management over the next year of implementation.

Sector #2: Economic Recovery & Market Systems

2.1. Support to 150 micro-entrepreneurs

During the past year, Mercy Corps provided on-going support and refresher trainings to 150 micro-entrepreneurs, conducting activities in small commerce, animal fattening and vegetable gardening. In addition, the entrepreneurship team has launched a small market facilitation pilot to engage targeted entrepreneurs in selling renewable energy products, including solar lanterns and improved cook stoves.



Figure 4. Entrepreneur in Ansongo selling beignets

This quarter, Mercy Corps' entrepreneurship team visited 53 of the supported micro-entrepreneurs at their places of work to provide coaching on the continued use of their business tools. Supply and stock management remain key issues for entrepreneurs; they continue to experience difficulties finding products locally and are obliged to order products from Niger, Gao or Bamako. Long delays in transport time are causing delays in their capacity to supply merchandise to their clientele. To respond to this challenge, Mercy Corps is connecting entrepreneurs to established wholesalers and supporting the entrepreneurs to work together to organize bulk orders, as well as discussing tailored stocking solutions to reduce shortages.

2.2. Establish/Strengthen 100 Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)

Mercy Corps' VSLAs, established in the beginning of the program, have completed two full savings and lending cycles under the Irtoun program. Many are demonstrating maturity and a high level of management capacity. Mercy Corps has trained a total of 30 village agents who have replicated the VSLA methodology to launch 117 additional new associations. The village agents are providing VSLA management trainings for payment in cash or in kind.

From July to September, Mercy Corps' VSLA team visited 88 out of 98 project-supported VSLAs, and reviewed fundamental elements of the VSLA methodology, such as savings processes, purchasing shares, applying for and reimbursing credit, and improving attendance. In general, the VSLAs are doing well and following the procedures that they put in place at the beginning of the cycle. Members of 79 VSLAs shared that they have begun collecting fines from members when they arrive late or are absent from meetings, as well as when they forget or lose their membership cards; this shows that they are



Figure 5. VSLA Wafakaye from Koundel conducting savings activities

maturing in their ability to apply the methodology and rules included in their association's by-laws. 17 of the 88 VSLAs have maintained the same management committees as at the outset of the program, while the others have transitioned power to other members of the group. This is also a promising sign, as the group members begin to understand what competencies and traits they want to see in their leadership, and have stayed together through the transition of management committee members. 35 VSLA members in total have left their VSLA due to travel (11 members), lack of financial capital to constitute savings (22) and 2 deaths.

In terms of financial health, 35 VSLAs are applying interest rates of 5%, 42 VSLAs are applying rates of 10%, and ten VSLAs are choosing not to apply interest as a function of their religious beliefs. As a reminder, each group is given the liberty to define their own interest rates, with guidance from Mercy Corps and their VA at the outset of the cycle. 23 VSLAs are registered with microfinance institutions, and 35 VSLAs have already submitted economic micro-projects to partner organizations for funding. Danish Refugee Council and Caritas have already financed 18 of Mercy Corps' VSLAs to conduct economic recovery micro-projects! Finally, as concerns solidarity accounts, 115 members of the savings groups have submitted applications and received payments from the solidarity fund, worth a total value of 595,000 FCFA.

In August, the financial status of the Mercy Corps supported VSLAs is as follows:

VSLA supported by Mercy Corps						
# VSLA	# members	Total savings in credit account (F CFA)	Total savings in solidarity account (F CFA)	Cumulative funds since the beginning of the cycle (F CFA)	Total amount of loans (F CFA)	# loans
94	2265	16 017 950	2 156 525	18 174 475	4 153 800	722
Independent VSLAs supported by Mercy Corps trained Village Agents						
# VSLA	# members	Total savings in credit account (F CFA)	Total savings in solidarity account (F CFA)	Cumulative funds since the beginning of the cycle (F CFA)	Total amount of loans (F CFA)	# loans
117	2786	12 693 950	2 839 250	15 533 200	4 969 500	845

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

Major monitoring and evaluation activities conducted during this reporting period included:

- Data collection on VSLA groups and entrepreneurs (reported above)
- Follow-up of tripartite contracts with Projet Solidaire, Gao wholesalers, and Total to move forward renewable energy pilot (more details to be provided next quarter)

6. Coordination

Mercy Corps' teams in Gao and Ansongo participate in periodic OCHA-organized coordination meetings that serve as an opportunity to discuss needs, ongoing activities of various partners, possible synergies between activities as well as challenges, particularly given the uncertain security context. This quarter, the team participated in the disaster planning meeting for flooding response, organized by the GIAC in Bara commune. The Gao office also hosted a visit of the civilian-military department of MINUSMA, who discussed with humanitarian actors present in the region the security implications of recent events in Gao. OCHA requested that Mercy Corps begin to serve as the humanitarian focal point in Ansongo Circle, organizing coordination meetings for the next year. As a first activity of Mercy Corps Ansongo's new mandate, the team organized inter-agency meetings with administrative and political authorities as well as community members to discuss challenges that these communities are facing, especially as related to food security.